



News Release

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY
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NATIONAL FOUNDATION HELPS DES IN EFFORTS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR ARIZONA'S CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

PHOENIX – (January 5, 2006) Casey Family Programs (Casey), the nation's largest foundation focused on improving the lives of children in foster care, is assisting the Arizona Department of Economic Security to enhance local leadership and accountability in efforts to improve outcomes for families and children through increased collaboration among the agency, its clients and community partners.

For the past two years, DES has been implementing a variety of strategies as part of Service Integration with the following goals:

- **Reduce the adult cash benefit caseload** by reducing barriers such as substance abuse and domestic violence, helping adults find work more quickly, and increasing work supports like child care.
- **Reduce the number of children in foster care** by better supporting at-risk families, implementing strategies to keep children safe at home, and involving communities in supporting abused and neglected children.
- And, **reduce the number of children living in group homes and shelters** by increasing the number of foster and adoptive homes available and implementing strategies to keep children safe while supporting their families when they leave foster care.

Several strategies have already been implemented to further those goals, including a more streamlined process to secure employment for those on cash assistance and crisis intervention teams that prevent situations of domestic violence and homelessness from escalating. The success of Service Integration strategies depends on coordination among various DES programs, but also collaboration with private, non-profit, faith-based and local government agencies to fill gaps in services and engage families in the process.

"Because the needs and resources in each community vary, it is important to have a dedicated team in each area responsible for making this happen," DES Director David Berns said. "The training and support the teams will receive from Casey are a critical step in that process."

The Casey process, called a Breakthrough Series Collaborative, has helped participating child welfare systems design and implement strategies to improve outcomes for abused and neglected children. Arizona is participating in two such series aimed at supporting extended families caring for children removed from their homes and addressing the over-representation of minority children in child welfare. This is the first time since Casey began implementing breakthrough series' that the approach has been tried on a broader human services issue.

"We are honored that Director Berns approached us to work with the Department of Economic Security to apply our innovative process on a state-wide level. Our ultimate goal is to improve the

delivery of comprehensive services by making them easier for families to access and far less cumbersome,” stated Dennis Ichikawa, Field Office and State Strategies Director for Casey.

The basic premise is to establish teams in each county, made up equally of clients, agency staff and community representatives, to look at simple, effective strategies that can be implemented quickly and with existing resources. Longer-term strategies, including those that require significant resources and infrastructure or those that do not involve the agency but still affect the families they serve, are being looked at through broader-based Community Network Teams that also exist in each county.

“Breakthrough series teams look at what can be done right now; Community Network Teams look at what are the gaps and how to fill them.” Berns said. “They complement each other and work together to achieve a common goal: that every child, adult and family in Arizona will be safe and economically secure.”

The breakthrough series is one strategy the Department is employing to move Service Integration forward. Other strategies, current and future, as well as lessons learned from those efforts and the Hurricane Katrina relief experience, are detailed in *Service Integration: A Partnership for Safe and Stable Families in Arizona*, a report released by the Department today.

Among the additional strategies outlined in the report are:

- **Re-designing job functions to address prevention and early intervention.** A re-designed Service Coordinator position – a highly skilled employee trained in eligibility, case management, employment assistance and social work competencies – works with clients to explore grant diversion and other options for addressing the client’s immediate needs, with the goal of eliminating the family’s need for longer-term cash assistance.
- **Multi-service centers.** In several locations statewide, multi-service centers were developed to encourage field offices that housed multiple programs to improve service coordination at the local level. The multi-service centers combine a variety of service integration strategies in their efforts, including a holistic needs assessment, co-location with other programs or community partners, and information sharing across systems.
- **Child Protective Services Blueprint.** This blueprint, released in November 2005, outlines strategies for improving CPS to reduce the number of children in out-of-home care and to reduce the number of children – particularly children under 6 years old – who are placed in group homes and shelters.

Service Integration: A Partnership for Safe and Stable Families in Arizona also describes the lessons DES learned in its leadership role while assisting evacuees from Hurricane Katrina. In addition to providing for evacuees’ immediate need for emotional support, basic needs and employment, the Department and its community partners have provided on-going support and services to Katrina families. Among the lessons learned in this experience were:

- Clear and decisive leadership sets the tone of urgency and accountability for both DES and other providers.
- Empowered staff and managers, both internal to the Department and in external service providers, are key to successful service integration.
- Local control and ability to make informed decisions quickly are critical to flexibility. This flexibility allows families to make informed choices about their lives.
- Service integration fosters and is strengthened by personal and professional relationships among staff from many providers at the local level. The result is the service delivery system becomes a network of formal (contracted) and informal (personal) linkages that creates a system in which “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

“Involving those who need services, those who provide services, and the communities that support both creates a more holistic approach that leads to improved outcomes for families,” Berns said. “We need to build on the momentum created by the strategies we are already implementing and our Katrina relief experiences to move the service integration experience forward and make significant improvements in outcomes for children and families.”

Service Integration: A Partnership for Safe and Stable Families in Arizona is available by visiting <http://www.azdes.gov/ASP/pdf/ServiceIntegration.pdf>: In order to reduce printing costs, a limited number of printed copies will be available. Please contact the DES Public Information Office at pio@azdes.gov to order a copy.